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George C. Christensen  
*Iowa State College*

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## Centennial Feature

# With Honor to the Past

George C. Christensen, D.V.M., Ph. D.

**“WITH HONOR** to the past—with vision for the future,” the centennial theme of Iowa State College, is a motto befitting a respected institution of higher learning. In veterinary medical education a great debt, and much honor, is owed to the pioneers of the past. “With vision for the future,” the most significant

Dr. Christensen is an associate professor in the Department of Anatomy and Histology, Iowa State College.

phrase of the centennial theme, implies that in veterinary medicine, as well as in other fields of higher education, some problems have already been solved and no longer are problems, that new problems are always arising and are calling for solution, and that the veterinary educator, in association with his students, will stand on the frontiers of knowledge and attempt their solution.



Figure 1. Outdoor clinic in present veterinary quadrangle (1913).



**Figure 2. Hospital class room (1913). This is the present veterinary anatomy lecture room.**

A bill founding a "State Agricultural College" was signed by Governor Ralph P. Lowe on March 22, 1858, and included provisions for the establishment of the Veterinary Division. Although 1958 is not the centennial year for the Division of Veterinary Medicine, it coincides closely with the centennial of formal veterinary education in the United States. One hundred years ago American veterinary schools were in their first stages of infancy.

Evidence from Europe, Asia and Africa indicates that knowledge of the anatomy and therapy of animals is almost as old as the earliest association of man and animal. Stone age paintings of the dissected horse and mammoth have been found. The veterinary papyrus of Kahun (1900 B.C.) describes a series of prescriptions for the bull and dog.

In spite of the ancient beginnings of veterinary medicine, the first formal veterinary school was founded in Lyons, France, in 1762. This was soon followed by schools in Austria, Belgium, Russia, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Great Britain. Consequently, the first scientific-

ally trained veterinarians in this country were of European origin.

In the 1850's, the decade of the birth of Iowa State College, empiricism and quackery were all too evident. A few veterinarians attempted to correct this situation by initiating professional "schools" of the proprietary type. Most of these were short-lived and unsatisfactory, but some established excellent reputations and existed for many years.

In the 1860's, Iowa State College and some other American colleges and universities had courses in veterinary science. However, the Iowa State College Division of Veterinary Medicine, established on May 23, 1879, was the first state supported college in existence. Up until that time, veterinarians were often self-taught or learned what they knew from older practitioners. This paralleled the procedure practiced by physicians.

The private schools of the era were interested in applied research, but some crusaders visualized the need for basic investigations. In 1878, Dr. J. Arnold of the University Medical College of New York City wrote:

"And now, what can be said of what is being done here in our own land to further scientific medicine, or offer inducement to those who are willing to devote their energies to such a noble enterprise? A truthful answer would be of no flattering character, for we shall find that not only the community at large, be they horse doctors or man doctors, either take no interest in these higher studies, or being ignorant or indolent, they decry true scientific work because they can see no practical application. This desire for instantaneous practical results is the damnation of true science; the telegraph, the steam engine were not developed by men of commercial minds, but by those who, seeking diligently for knowledge, which is truth, found the precious treasure, and being pure of heart, gave to their fellow men the result of their labors."

The idea of a truly scientific veterinary college in Ames was conceived by Dr. Milliken Stalker, who had graduated in Agriculture in 1873 and had attended the New York College of Veterinary Surgeons and the Toronto Veterinary College. Dr. Stalker became the first dean of a "school" which shared quarters with the department of botany in President Welch's old house. A small bedroom served as laboratory and the front parlor as the lecture room. The president's barn served as the first animal clinic. The course of instruction was 2 years of 9 months each. In light of present requirements and scope of subject material, this seems woefully inadequate. However, at that time medical schools generally required two school years of 4 to 6 months each.

On November 6, 1882, a \$500 contract for a new hospital building was approved. A few days later \$1,000 was paid for a model of a horse. Anatomy was considered to be the most important branch of veterinary medicine and clinics consisted of comparatively few animals. Students could board for \$2.25 per week; fires and lights were 40 cents per week; incidentals, 21 cents per week; and room rent \$1.50 per term. Dancing on the college grounds was forbidden by action of the Board of Trustees. Social life was centered about the literary societies, where orations, original essays, recitations, debates and music were given by individual members. Another popular

senior pastime in 1884 was wheeling junior ladies around in wheel-barrows. Six out of twenty-one possible students received their D.V.M. degrees in 1885, at a time when the student body of Iowa State College totaled 305.

Knowledge progresses by people seeing a problem where other people have not seen one. Therefore, neither buildings nor grounds but men make a university. The most vital part of any educational institution is its faculty. An examination of the staff that first influenced the college is thus necessary.

Drs. M. Stalker and D. S. Fairchild comprised the first faculty of the veterinary school. They were not mere images on photographic paper nor static impressions inked upon the pages of a history book, but people with concern for the future of scientific medicine, possessing curiosity about their surroundings and their fellow men. They walked the same paths and saw many of the trees that are still present on the Iowa State College campus. Only the sure passage of time has placed them in a realm of historical interest.

Dr. Stalker had the reputation of being a great lecturer in anatomy and clinical subjects and, in his role as state veterinarian, contributed greatly to the knowledge of disease control. He was also responsible for the first Veterinary Practice Act in Iowa and was credited with being the principal leader in the advanced stand taken in connection with the suppression of contagious diseases.

Dr. Fairchild, who was also college physician, served as the first Professor of Histology, Pathology, and Therapeutics. The character of Dr. Fairchild might be illustrated by an incident in 1883. He thought the typhoid epidemic in Ames was caused by a defective sewage system. He and some colleagues privately borrowed money to pay for the repair of the system. Dr. Fairchild also made many noteworthy literary contributions to medical science and ultimately became president of the American Medical Association.

These two men carried the burden of the responsibility for the Division of Veterinary Medicine from its beginning



**Figure 3. Pathology laboratory (1920). Dr. E. A. Benbrook is standing on the left and Dr. H. E. Biester is in the center of the photograph.**

in 1879 until 1893. House surgeons and non-resident lecturers were changed frequently, but actually did little to relieve the professors of any major responsibility for teaching or research. Dr. Fairchild resigned in 1893 to become division surgeon for the Chicago and Northwestern railway. Dr. Stalker remained active until 1900, leaving behind an enivable record of scholarship, research, and vision for the future.

In addition to being good teachers, many members of the early veterinary faculties were pioneers in research, leaving behind records of original investigation into the etiology and treatments of such diseases as bovine tuberculosis, actinomycosis, glanders, and hog cholera. Then, as now, research and teaching went hand in hand.

The faculty of the Veterinary Division has increased in number from two in 1879 to over fifty in 1958. During this steady process of growth and maturation, many notable veterinarians have taught the generations of students. A short review of veterinary medicine at Iowa State College could hardly begin to describe the characters, personalities, and scientific attainments of the men who have contri-

buted to the present high stature of the Veterinary Division. Responsible administrators or deans have been Dr. Milliken Stalker, 1879–1900; President William H. Beardshear, 1900–1903; Dean J. H. McNeil, 1903–1908; Dean Charles H. Stange, 1909–1936; Dean Charles Murray, 1936–1943; Dean Henry D. Bergman, 1943–1952; Dean Ival A. Merchant, 1952–.

A college is often, and justly, judged by its students. To date, a total of fifteen Iowa State College alumni have served as deans of veterinary colleges. Two, Drs. Stange and Bergman, were elected to the office of President of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Dr. W. A. Aitken is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. Numerous others have attained positions of responsibility and honor as teachers and investigators in educational institutions, as officers of national and state veterinary associations, and in governmental positions. Countless books and research papers written by faculty and former students attest to the ceaseless quest for truth by those who have been associated with Iowa State College.

In this centennial year a summary of early building pains on the campus is

worthy of mention. The former home of President Welch, as previously mentioned, was used for veterinary and botany courses until 1881. Both departments then moved to North Hall which, according to Dr. Fairchild, contained a large and commodious classroom. The laboratory arrangements consisted of a series of tables of triangular shape with the base next to the window. Since this was before the science of bacteriology had been developed, very few accessories were used.

The new Sanitary Building, occupied in 1885, was considered to be the most complete veterinary school in the country. When the foundation had been laid, Professor Stanton let it be known that he could not tolerate the idea of having the rather unattractive rear end of the building facing his house. So, the building was turned quarter way around. The animal hospital stood on the site of the present Great Hall in the Memorial Union.

The current veterinary quadrangle was first occupied in 1912. The central court, now landscaped and occupied by statues and benches, was originally used to exercise and treat animals. The present anatomy building housed surgical and clinical departments. The need for a larger clinic building resulted in the completion of Stange Memorial Clinic in 1938.

In discussing the history of the Division of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State College, it is possible to write volumes on the steady improvement of physical facilities, on the lives of individual members of the faculty, on brilliant careers of former students; or on the overall contributions of the college to the veterinary profession, to the livestock industry, and to society in general. Each of these areas can be organized into a fascinating tale. Certainly there is "honor to the past." The first institution to accept the provisions of the Morrill Land-Grant Act, Iowa State College has become a first rank scientific institution in teaching, in research and in service to the people.

However, there must be a constant awareness of the second phrase of the centennial theme, "with vision for the future." Certainly each student has the re-

sponsibility for his own education. If a student asks profound questions of his subject-matter, and learns to answer them, a study of stock answers given to other problems will not satisfy his needs. But each faculty member is duty-bound to reorient the minds of his students away from the static and the eternal towards the dynamic and the impermanent.

Yes, the history of a school, of a profession, or of a nation is often informative, often inspiring, and often flattering. But frequently the problems of today cannot be answered by the solutions of yesterday. The scientist or clinician has to put a specific question to himself. He does not "do" chemistry or medicine, but solves chemical or diagnostic problems. In its "vision for the future," members of the Iowa State College family have an obligation to search for truth, to make up their own minds, and to let others know what they think.

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When maleic hydrazide was introduced, it was found in some cases that the arrest of cell division was accompanied by chromosome breakage. As nearly all chromosome breaking agents are also cancer producing, a study was begun on this compound. It has been found now to have no effect on the growth of normal mammals or isolated mammalian tissues, but does cause breakage of chromosomes of plant cells.